## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

## HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 29

## BY HEALTH AND WELFARE COMMITTEE

## A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

STATING FINDINGS OF THE LEGISLATURE AND ENCOURAGING CERTAIN OFFICERS, AGENCIES, AND EMPLOYEES OF THE STATE TO BECOME INFORMED ABOUT THE IMPACTS OF TRAUMATIC CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES AND TO IMPLEMENT INTERVENTIONS AND PRACTICES TO DEVELOP RESILIENCY IN CHILDREN AND ADULTS WHO SUFFERED FROM TRAUMATIC CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES.

Be It Resolved by the Legislature of the State of Idaho:

WHEREAS, there have been recent significant advances in neuroscience with increased understanding of how emotional neglect and exposure to serious trauma affect the way children perceive and interact with their world both during childhood and into adulthood; and

WHEREAS, post-traumatic stress disorder and other trauma-related disorders in children and adults can be caused both by exposure to a single severe traumatic incident or by exposure to a cumulative series of serious traumatic events; and

WHEREAS, such traumatic incidents and events include emotional and physical abuse and neglect, sexual abuse, separation from or loss of a parent due to divorce or other reasons, serious injury or death of a parent, exposure to family discord, domestic violence, parental mental illness, substance abuse, criminal activity in the home, and other traumatic and non-nurturing experiences and environments; and

WHEREAS, abuse, neglect, and traumatic events compose part of what has been described in medical literature as "adverse childhood experiences" or "ACEs," and the cumulative potential impact to a child who has a significant history of exposure to neglect and trauma can be calculated using what is called an ACE score; and

WHEREAS, it is now understood that significant exposure to severe traumatic events as described above can negatively affect the neurobiology and anatomy of a child's developing brain and result in a substantially impaired ability to absorb new information, develop healthy coping skills, and adapt to life's challenges as the child becomes locked into a "fight-flight-orfreeze" mode that becomes the child's and future adult's default approach when interacting with the world around them; and

WHEREAS, children and adults whose brains have been negatively affected by exposure to severe or repeated serious trauma often experience persistent and sometimes overwhelming dysfunctional emotions of fear, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, and anger and may exhibit socially inappropriate labile and aggressive behaviors or may exhibit socially inappropriate emotional detachment and avoidance behaviors; and

WHEREAS, these negative coping behaviors and dysfunctional emotions limit a person's capacity to form healthy stable relationships, foster social capital, learn from experiences and mistakes, set and achieve

short-term and long-term goals, and succeed in educational and vocational pursuits; and

WHEREAS, in addition to the above negative outcomes, children and adults are more likely to attempt to self-medicate trauma-related "fight-flight-or-freeze" anxiety and emotional dysfunction by using available substances such as tobacco, alcohol, prescription medications, and street drugs, including heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine, and cannabis; and

WHEREAS, because of the cumulative adverse effects of the above negative outcomes on their physical health and emotional and cognitive capabilities, children and adults affected by severe traumatic events, despite their sincere and best efforts to succeed in life, are more likely to:

1. Perform poorly in school and other academic pursuits;

- 2. Struggle with work performance and sustainable employment;
- 3. Become chronically unemployed as adults, resulting in financial stress, reduced quality of life, and increased risk of experiencing long-term disability, homelessness, and other personal and family traumatic experiences;
- 4. Become dependent on and addicted to tobacco, alcohol, prescription medications, illicit drugs, and other substances;
- 5. Become directly engaged with law enforcement and the criminal justice system;
- 6. Suffer from significant mental illness, including depression, psychosis, and severe anxiety, leading to suicides and attempted suicides that otherwise would not have occurred;
- 7. Suffer from serious physical health problems with poor long-term outcomes that otherwise would not have occurred;
- 8. Engage in high-risk sexual behaviors as adolescents and adults, including onset of sexual activity at an early age and multiple sexual partners, resulting in increased risks of adolescent pregnancy and paternity, other unintended pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases;
- 9. Experience significant problems and failures in marriage and other intimate partner relationships;
- 10. Become victims or perpetrators of intimate partner violence as adults;
- 11. Struggle, despite their sincere efforts, to provide a stable and nurturing environment for their current and future children, resulting in increased likelihood of intergenerational trauma and intergenerational poverty; and
- 12. Face a life expectancy shortened by as many as 20 years when compared to average life expectancy for adults who did not experience severe trauma as children; and

WHEREAS, with an increase in understanding about the impacts of trauma has come the development of evidence-based questionnaires that identify behaviors and health-related disorders in children and adults that can be indicative of possible trauma-related exposures; and

WHEREAS, using these questionnaires can provide the opportunity to identify and refer a child or adult for appropriate additional evaluation and treatment; and

WHEREAS, the mental health profession can effectively diagnose and treat trauma-related disorders following evidence-based approaches that have been proven to be successful; and

 WHEREAS, early childhood offers an important window of elevated opportunity to prevent, treat, and heal the impacts of adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress on a child's brain and body; and

WHEREAS, a critical factor in buffering a child from the negative effects of toxic stress and adverse childhood experiences is the existence of at least one stable, supportive relationship between the child and a nurturing adult; and

WHEREAS, with the increase in scientific understanding and ability to identify, prevent, and treat trauma-related disorders, there is great hope for thousands of Idaho children and adults to begin healing from the negative effects of adverse childhood experiences, to develop resiliency, and to have brighter, more productive futures than was previously possible; and

WHEREAS, in order to maximize the potential for positive outcomes of evidence-based interventions in the treatment of severe trauma, it is imperative that employees of the State of Idaho and other people who interact directly with vulnerable children and adults become informed regarding the effects of trauma on the human brain and available screening and assessment tools and treatment interventions that lead to increased resiliency in children and adults who struggle in life as the result of trauma-related disorders.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the members of the Second Regular Session of the Sixty-sixth Idaho Legislature, the House of Representatives and the Senate concurring therein, that all officers, agencies, and employees of the State of Idaho whose responsibilities include working with vulnerable children and adults, such as the State Board of Education, the State Department of Education, the Department of Health and Welfare, the Department of Correction, the Department of Juvenile Corrections, the Department of Labor, and Idaho courts, are encouraged to:

- 1. Become informed regarding well-documented detrimental short-term and long-term impacts to children and adults from serious traumatic childhood experiences as outlined above; and
- 2. Implement evidence-based interventions and practices that are proven to be successful in developing resiliency in children and adults currently suffering from trauma-related disorders to help them recover from their trauma and function at their full capacity and potential in school, in the workplace, and in community, family, and interpersonal relationships.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be sent to the State Board of Education, the State Department of Education, the Department of Health and Welfare, the Department of Correction, the Department of Juvenile Corrections, the Department of Labor, and the Idaho Supreme Court.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be sent to all non-profit agencies and other entities that contract with the State of Idaho to provide services to vulnerable children and adults.